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Under Secretary Spiers

Current
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Diplomacy, the Foreign Service, and the Department of State

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Following is an address by Ronald I. Spiers, Under Secretary for Management, before the Boston Committee on Foreign Relations, Boston, Massachusetts, February 26, 1986.

Americans with an interest in foreign affairs—such as the members of the Boston Committee on Foreign Relations—are generally familiar with the major foreign policy issues confronting the United States: the Arab-Israeli dispute, U.S.-Soviet relations, arms control, Nicaragua, the problems of southern Africa, and so on. They are less familiar with the workings of the institutions and processes by which American foreign policies are developed. My assignment this evening is to talk briefly about two of the principal instruments of American diplomacy: the Department of State and the U.S. Foreign Service; what are their responsibilities; how do they work?

My 35 years of association with these organizations have given me ample demonstrations of an information gap. In my native Vermont my identification with the Department of State more often than not leads to the question: "How are things up to Montpelier?" Frequently, the Foreign Service is vaguely confused with the Foreign Legion. Yet there are no other institutions more central to the national security of the United States.

The Department of State is the oldest and just about the smallest of the executive departments of the government, and the Secretary of State is the senior ranking Cabinet member. When it was created, in 1781, as the "Department of Foreign Affairs," it had a four-man staff headquartered in a small three-story Philadelphia house. Eight years later, Congress changed its name to the Department of State in an "Act to provide for the safe keeping of the acts, records and Seal of the United States, and other purposes." The Great Seal of the United States is still in its custody and can be seen and used today, but it is those unidentified "other purposes" that preoccupy us now.

Managing Diplomatic Relations

Diplomacy is essentially the craft of managing a nation's relations with other sovereign entities. For this purpose the Department of State has about 24,000 full-time employees worldwide, an annual operating budget of just under $2 billion, and staffs 263 embassies, consulates, and missions abroad and at home. Of these employees, over 14,000 are Americans, and close to 10,000 are foreign nationals who perform functions ranging from chauffeur to political adviser at overseas missions.

What are the principal responsibilities of the Department of State? They include:

- Managing the wide range of day-to-day relations between the United States and 140-odd other sovereign states, both bilaterally and through multilateral organizations ranging from NATO to the United Nations;
- Collecting the information and performing the analyses necessary to recommend, decide on, and carry out the foreign policies of the United States;
- Providing passport, consular, and citizen protective services to Americans abroad; and
- Influencing the environment in which the United States acts in ways which promote the achievement of U.S. policy objectives.

The principal arm of the Department of State in fulfilling these responsibilities is the U.S. Foreign Service. Created in 1924 as a career Service based on competitive examination and merit promotion, there are now 4,200 Foreign Service officers and another 5,000 serving as specialists, secretaries, communications technicians, etc.

Foreign Service officers serve in Washington at various levels from assistant desk officer to under secretary of state. Overseas they are at all levels from attache or third secretary to ambassador. Entry is competitive. Over 18,000 individuals took the Foreign Service examination last December. At the end of a taxing process of evaluation, 225 of these will finally enter the Service. All of them will have their first assignment overseas, most of them as consular officers issuing visas and helping American citizens abroad.

After this, they will go on to a further assignment in the "cone," or specialty, for which they were selected,

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as administrative, economic, political, or consular officer. In 4 or 5 years, 85% of them will be tenured as full-fledged Foreign Serivce officers and begin moving progressively toward more senior and responsible positions. Of an entry class of 50, statistically three or four of them will ultimately be appointed an ambassador or an assistant secretary of state. Half of their careers will typically be spent abroad, normally in 3- or 4-year tours of duty in foreign postings or in Washington. Each stage of their advancement will be competitive. Fifty percent will, after a number of years of service, be promoted into the 670-member Senior Foreign Service from which the top positions in Washington and the embassies and consulates will be filled. There is no other career from which the satisfaction of contributing so much to the formation and execution of American foreign policy can be derived. The Foreign Serivce is on the front line, day in and day out. Along with its colleagues from the professional military and intelligence services, it is at the cutting edge of the advancement and protection of U.S. national security interests.

Of course, there are difficulties and dangers along with the satisfactions. Terrorism and political instability are continuing and growing threats. There is a memorial plaque in the lobby of the Department of State dedicated to those members of the U.S. diplomatic missions who have been killed in the line of duty. Thirty-six names have been added just in the last decade. More American ambassadors alone have been killed than generals and admirals in the Vietnam war. There are the difficulties of isolation, inadequate education facilitics, lack of opportunity for spouse employment, disease, family separation, cultural deprivation, and the rootlessness that can come from constant packing and unpacking. The old stereotype of the striped-pants diplomat moving from cocktail party to cocktail party dies slowly, but it is dying.

The basic unit for the conduct of American diplomacy overseas is the American Embassy. An embassy, properly speaking, is the staff of an ambassador who is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. An ambassador is the personal representative of the President to another head of state. Although he or she receives instructions from the Secretary of State in his role as principal foreign affairs adviser to the President, an ambassador is the symbol and embodiment of the United States. Sixty percent of U.S. ambassadors are currently drawn from the career Service. The others are political appointees coming from other walks of life.

The ambassador's alter ego is the deputy chief of mission, always an experienced member of the Foreign Service. Below that level, the embassy is organized into functional sections staffed by members of the Department of State or other agencies. There are normally political, economic, consular, administrative, and public affairs sections, headed by counselors in large embassies. On a global basis, Department of State American personnel comprise only 29% of embassy staffs. Defense, AID [Agency for International Development], and USIA [United States Information Agency] personnel also constitute large percentages, but there are approximately 30 agencies of government, ranging from the Coast Guard to the Library of Congress, with personnel assigned to U.S. missions overseas. The senior personnel from the agencies normally constitute what is called the "country team," which is chaired by the ambassador or deputy chief of mission and acts as a principal advisory body to the chief of mission.

An expensive and sophisticated communications system connects American embassies and consulates with Washington and with each other. Instructions flow out from Washington; information, policy recommendations, and analyses flow in from the field. An average of 5,550 messages will be received at headquarters and 1,300 sent out daily.

Role of the Ambassador

It is a myth that an ambassador has been made into nothing more than a messenger boy by the ease and speed of modern transportation and communications. An ambassador's energy, persuasiveness, judgment, contacts, ability to act cooly or improvise quickly on the basis of experience or good instincts, and intimate knowledge of U.S. goals and objectives can be crucial in a crisis. We have just seen a demonstration of these truths by our ambassador in the Philippines. There is no substitute for on-the-spot knowledge of other cultures, languages, personalities, and the right buttons to push to get results. Diplomacy is very much a matter of interpersonal relationships. An ambassador has many roles: "mayor" of a community, "managing director" of a mission which can range in size from a small embassy of five or six people, such as in Benin or Brunei, or a large one of hundreds, as in Cairo or Manila. He and his subordinates truly represent the United States and can have a profound influence on attitudes of local officials and populations toward the United States.

Perhaps one personal experience will illustrate some aspects of an ambassador's job. For almost 3 years during President Carter's Administration, I served as envoy to Turkey, a key NATO ally. When I went to Ankara, an arms embargo—imposed by the Congress of the United States—had been in force for some time, and our relations with this important country had deteriorated badly. It quickly became clear to me that continuation of the embargo would have a very bad impact on significant U.S. interests in NATO's southern flank. The embargo had been imposed ostensibly in retaliation for Turkey's 1974 incursion into Cyprus after the overthrow of Archbishop Makarios. My own view was that, in good part, it was a way of showing a Democratic Congress' frustration with Henry Kissinger's policies and resistance to congressional wishes. In any event, it was a costly policy for the United States in many ways.

I first had to make the case for a reversal of the policy to Secretary of State Vance. Vance knew what the arguments against its continuation were but initially was loath to take on the burden of challenging a policy that apparently had strong majority support in Congress. Many Members of Congress had little understanding of the history of the Cyprus conflict or that the embargo policy was counterproductive, but were quite attentive to the views of ethnic Greek constituents. In time, I and others (including particularly General Al Haig, who was NATO Supreme Commander and had a keen appreciation of Turkey's importance to European defense) prevailed on both Secretary Vance and President Carter to try to achieve a reversal of Congress' action. This meant several trips to Washington to meet with colleagues in the Departments of State and Defense to mobilize help. I also made several speeches in Turkey outlining the antiembargo case. These angered a number of prominent Senators and Congressmen who felt I was stepping out of bounds in challenging a policy approved by the Congress. By that time, however, there was substantial support in the Administration for the position I advocated.

During the spring of 1978, I returned to Washington to participate in an intensive lobbying effort in Congress.

During the course of more than a month, I met with almost 100 individual Members of Congress, some of them two or three times. I believe I was able to prevail on a good number of Members to revise their view on this issue. On the day of the vote, I sat in the gallery of the Senate and watched the anti-embargo forces win by a narrow margin.

This anecdote illustrates several things: an ambassador's functions are not only performed in his country of accreditation but also on the home front. Ability to persuade, effectiveness in a highly political environment while keeping good personal relations with those of a different viewpoint, and willingness to challenge conventional wisdom or established policies are part of an ambassador's armory. Firsthand knowledge of a situation often makes him more effective than Washington officials whose distance from a problem give them a less nuanced feel for it.

Organization and Functions of the Department of State

The Department of State in Washington is, of course, the "center," the source of instructions, the setter of goals and objectives necessary to carry out the President's foreign policy. It should never be forgotten that the President of the United States is the chief foreign policy official of our government. Presidents vary in the degree they rely on the Department of State. Presidents Roosevelt and Nixon relied little—in fact, avoided reliance in important areas. Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan—and most of the others in my experience—rely more. The most important determining factor is the relationship between the President and his Secretary of State. Confidence and trust will enlarge the Department's role; suspicion will diminish it. It is particularly important for professional Foreign Service officers to remember they are servants of a democratically elected leadership. While they should offer advice objectively and fearlessly, it is not permissible to substitute their judgment when they believe policy directions to be wrong. This, however, also exposes one of the Foreign Service's biggest pitfalls: a temptation to watch superiors to determine acceptable conclusions instead of interpreting facts and events on their own merits.

Every morning the Secretary of State—or the Deputy Secretary, in his absence—will meet with various groups of his senior officers among the four under secretaries with functional responsibilities and the 23 assistant secretary-level officials who are the operating chiefs of the bureaus. Bureaus are the basic organizational units of the Department. There are five geographic and 18 functional bureaus with responsibilities ranging from economic to politico-military affairs. Before these meetings, the participants will have reviewed or been briefed on the principal developments around the world since the preceding day. When I get to the office at about 7:30 a.m., I read the principal intelligence summaries—the National Intelligence Daily and the Secretary of State's Morning Summary and other assessments prepared by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. I look at a sampling of the most important message "traffic" from around the world, examine a record of the previous day's decisions by the Secretary and my senior colleagues, and check through a selection of morning press clippings. Since I have a particular responsibility for security of our people and missions overseas, I will also review all of the information relating to terrorist and security threats against our personnel from around the world. This latter is of growing volume.

At 8:45 a.m. I will join the Secretary's staff meeting for senior personnel, where the Press Spokesman will summarize the day's press reporting and comment and raise issues which will need to be dealt with in the Department's noon press briefing. The Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations will review problems which have arisen or may arise on the Hill or may require attention from members of the group. The Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Research will highlight political and other developments based on intelligence channel reporting. Other participants have an opportunity to raise matters which the Secretary or others should know about, either for general information or to seek guidance or comments. Similar meetings will be held with groups of functional or geographic assistant secretaries.

The groups will then disperse for the day's business, which will consist of a variety of activities: meetings with foreign officials; meetings with staff members to examine and resolve various policy or operational issues; preparation of policy recommendations or information for the Secretary or the White House; sessions to coordinate policy with other interested agencies; preparation and approval of instructions, studies, analyses, and congressional testimony; and so on. It is a varied, active—at times exciting—agenda. Frequently, there is the satisfaction of being able clearly to influence the course of world events. During the course of the day, the Secretary or Deputy Secretary will convene meetings which will be more policy oriented than the quick morning sessions. The Secretary has also held a number of "Saturday seminars" on various foreign policy issues ranging from Afghanistan to terrorism in which outside experts will join Department of State personnel for a free-flowing discussion of policy options and problems. Periodically, he will hold breakfast sessions with selected Members of Congress for the same purpose.

Formulating U.S Foreign Policy

I would like to finish with a few general observations about the U.S. foreign policy which emerges from these processes. In fact, I believe "foreign policy" is a misnomer. The United States has not one foreign policy, but hundreds. Policy is essentially the attitude which we adopt toward individual issues: Afghanistan, trade with Japan, aviation agreements with the U.S.S.R., and so on, almost into infinity. Policy has to be discussed in specific terms. We have a policy planning staff, and I have always thought this also was a misnomer. Policy is not "planned" because we cannot plan all the factors and actors which are beyond our control but have an influence on our policies.

As Mark Twain is alleged to have said about Wagner's music: "It's not as bad as it sounds." It has been charged that policy is not created but that it just happens and, to some limited extent, this is true. You can plan all you want, but if Congress does not give you the resources or has different views, your planning will be unavailing. Also, things will happen over which you have no control or which you cannot predict. In this connection, I was once taken to task as a member of the Foreign Service by a Congressman about our failure to foretell the Iranian revolution. I asked him to tell me the outcome of the coming election at home. His answer was, "How am I supposed to know? It depends on too many things." I said I fully understood the result would be shaped by many factors that had yet to emerge. I believe he got the message.

Nevertheless, U.S. foreign policy must not be inconsistent with the nature of our country and our people if it is to succeed. Henry Kissinger observed that public consent is the oxygen of U.S. foreign policy, and he was entirely correct. There is an ethos and ethic from which our policy must not depart. We do, and

will, make mistakes because our information is faulty, or incomplete, or an analysis flawed, or because we must act very quickly. Last week I was speaking with former Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Tom Moorer, who likened foreign affairs to commanding an aircraft carrier underway in port. It is moving, and you don't have the luxury of postponing decisions or prolonging discussion or waiting until every bit of information is in hand. Even staying on course is a decision. Dean Rusk used to characterize the difference between his experience in government and outside government by saying that outside government, you argue toward conclusions; inside, you have to argue toward decisions.

There are some things the United States must stand for if it is to be true to its history. We cannot fail to be advocates for those human rights for others that we value for ourselves. We must be advocates not for specific forms of democratic government but for the enlargement of the opportunities for political participation for those who are deprived of them. And, of course, the first public service any government owes its people is to provide security. That is another inescapable responsibility which must underpin our diplomacy.

At the same time, we must recognize that there are American characteristics which can affect our foreign policies in adverse ways: our history has given us a sense that all problems are resolvable with good will and effort—which is, unfortunately, often not the case—and an impatience for quick results. Our geographic isolation and our preoccupation with the task of taming a continent has resulted in a lack of historical perspective on important issues and a cultural absolutism that frequently leaves us to assume that the way we do things is the only way. The Foreign Serivce often has the role of guarding against the mistakes these can lead to. This is often unpopular, particularly with a new administration.

I see these as the principal ends our policies must serve: to promote human liberty and freedom of political choice, economic and social development, the rule of law, diplomatic resolution of international disputes, and constructive change. Radicalism and violence advance when routes to peaceful change are blocked. We may not always have the wisdom to design and gain acceptance of specific policies to advance these goals, but these goals should always be our touchstone.

Perhaps the best advice that Americans have ever received relevant to the conduct of our foreign relations is George Washington's eloquent plea: "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair; the event is in the hands of God." ■

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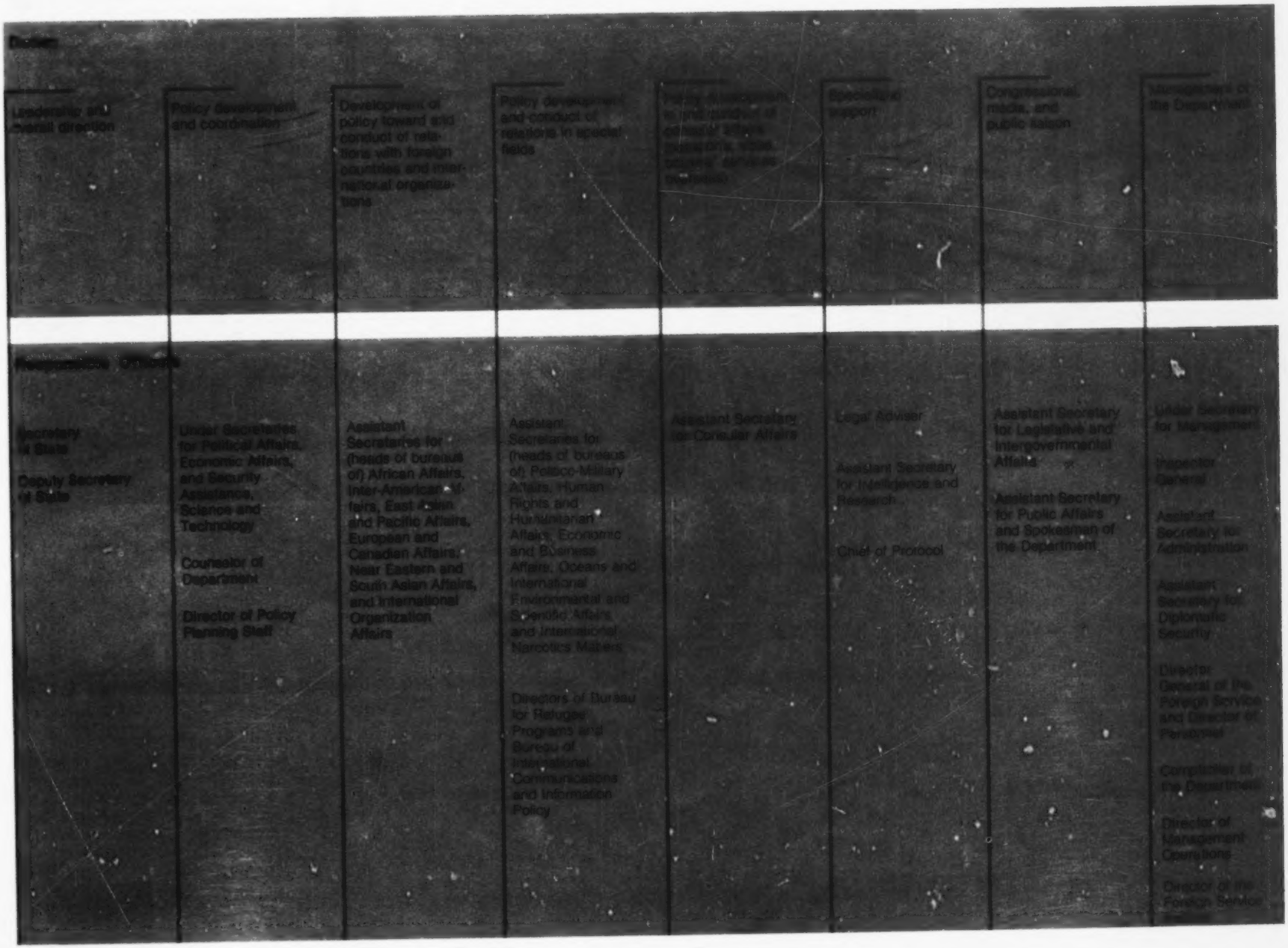
Responsibilities in the Department of State


Duties:
Leadership and overall direction
Policy development and coordination
Development of policy toward and conduct of relations with foreign countries and international organizations
Policy development and conduct of relations in special fields
Policy development in the conduct of economic affairs, international economic policy, trade, energy, and economic sanctions
Specialized support
Congressional, media, and public liaison
Management of the Department
Headquarters Officials:
Secretary of State
Deputy Secretary of State
Under Secretaries for Political Affairs, Economic Affairs, and Security Assistance, Science and Technology
Counselor of Department
Director of Policy Planning Staff
Assistant Secretaries for (heads of bureaus of) African Affairs, Inter-American Affairs, East Asian and Pacific Affairs, European and Canadian Affairs, Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, and International Organization Affairs
Assistant Secretaries for (heads of bureaus of) Politico-Military Affairs, Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, Economic and Business Affairs, Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, and International Narcotics Matters
Directors of Bureau for Refugee Programs and Bureau of International Communications and Information Policy
Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs
Legal Adviser
Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Research
Chief of Protocol
Assistant Secretary for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs
Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs and Spokesman of the Department
Under Secretary for Management
Inspector General
Assistant Secretary for Administration
Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security
Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Personnel
Comptroller of the Department
Director of Management Operations
Director of the Foreign Service

Adapted from Atlas of United States Foreign Relations, Dec. 1985

Diplomatic and Consular Representation

The United States normally accredits an ambassador (or a chief of mission of lesser rank) to each country with which the United States has diplomatic relations. In May 1985 the number of countries to which the United States had an accredited diplomatic mission was 153. Contacts with Bhutan, Maldives, and Vanuatu are maintained through embassies in neighboring countries or at the United Nations.

The United States has no diplomatic relations with Albania, Angola, Cambodia, Cuba, Iran, Mongolia, North Korea, Vietnam, and Yemen (Aden). In Cuba the United States maintains a U.S. Interests Section in the Swiss Embassy. All U.S. Embassy activities in Libya were suspended and U.S. personnel were withdrawn on May 2, 1980, but relations were not severed.

Consular posts provide various services for Americans in foreign countries and issue visas to foreigners for travel to the United States. Each embassy has a consular section, and there are separate consular facilities (see map).

Other Permanent U.S. Foreign Service Posts

- U.S. Mission to the United Nations (New York)
- U.S. Mission to the European Office of the United Nations and other International Organizations (Geneva)
- Permanent U.S. Mission to the Organization of American States (Washington, D.C.)
- U.S. Mission to Berlin
- U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Brussels)
- U.S. Mission to the UN Agencies for Food and Agriculture (Rome)
- U.S. Mission to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Paris)
- U.S. Mission to the European Communities (Brussels)
- U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Vienna
- U.S. Mission to the International Civil Aviation Organization (Montreal)
- U.S. Observer Mission to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Paris)

See appendix for list of embassies and consular facilities.

The United States has not recognized the incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the U.S.S.R. Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.

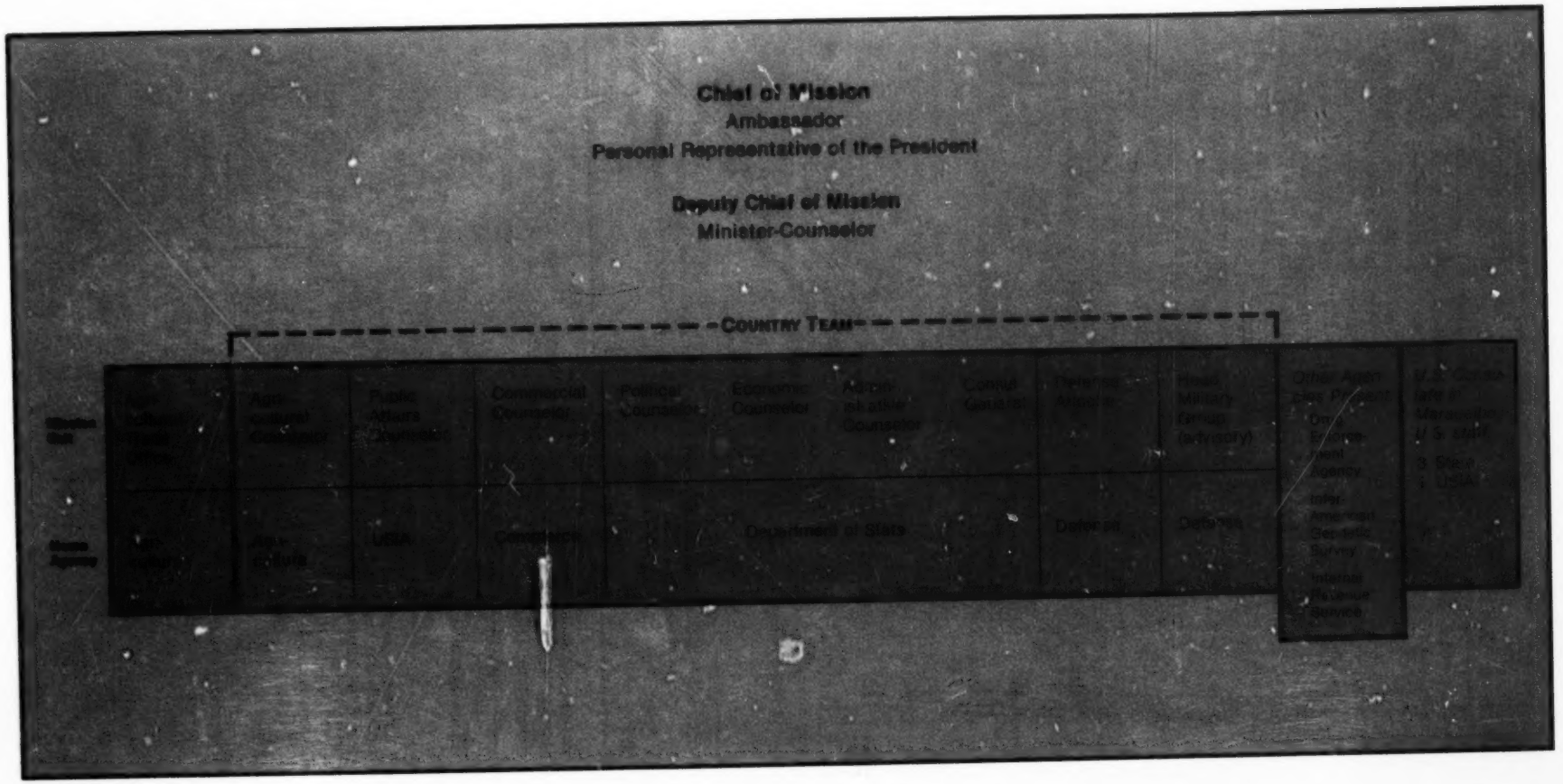
Reprinted from Atlas of United States Foreign Relations, Dec. 1985.

A U.S. Mission in a Foreign Country—Venezuela

A U.S. mission in a foreign country is classified as an embassy if the permanent chief of mission has the rank of ambassador. U.S. embassies usually consist of political, economic, consular, and administrative sections staffed by members of the Foreign Service and the Department of State and, depending on need, of specialized sections employing personnel from other departments and agencies. The Foreign Commercial Service of the Department of Commerce is responsible for commercial program activity in 66 countries, and the Foreign Agricultural Service of the Department of Agriculture has officers posted at embassies in nearly 40 countries.

The ambassador is the personal representative of the President. He or she must represent U.S. policy to the host government and coordinate and integrate the activities of all U.S. personnel in the host country (with the exception of military personnel under area command). The ambassador is assisted in these duties by the country team comprising the heads of the various embassy elements. The ambassador reports to the President and receives instructions through the Secretary of State.

In June 1985 there were 108 Americans employed in the Embassy and other offices in Caracas, Venezuela, and the consulate in Maracaibo. By comparison, the U.S. staff at the Embassy in London numbered 266, and in Brazzaville, People's Republic of the Congo, 21. Most of the Americans assigned to the mission in Venezuela were members of the Foreign Service. There were about 30 civilian and military employees of the Department of Defense.



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